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Bard

It's what they put inside. At last it's come,
the brilliant weather, thermometer my only favorite flute!
Morning opera evening metal lattices unpiecing
heart by heart, a prayer by poem, then
silenced by breath.

Ma vie entière for you
(morning & evening, the ten thousand things, the batter and the oil,
brand names, queens and aces, a grey morning
best for travel. To the sacred precinct where we get our salt.)

I speak of what I do, these words that I am native of,
bush and rock and wick and bay, Barbary the Blest,
this wet west. We watched the ducks sail yesterday
in some multitudes down Clermont's shore.

1 October 1994

Old boy hard inside
the self song Haggard
come home with salt.

The ivory kill. Twill
sweat soak Susan
Hayward hunter gun

mad husband
remarkable retention
savage attitude.

The works. Everyone
aids. Telegram
from Nietzsche

what comes is Italy
men left in the sun
burnt fantasies

top of a hill.
Womanless patrol.
Come live with me

and be different
comma
in endless text

what language are
the natives speaking now.
So this is Africa.

2 October 1994

The window makes the wind.

The change
from secrecy to openness occasions it. It spills
whatever it is from out to in
and is us. Changed, we shiver and stand back.

Perhaps we close the window then, or not,
it is too late, whatever was out is in
and in is out, the handsome doorman

is irreversible. Not tragic, his stance. It is sand.
Which comes in sometimes too
far as we are from the least ocean.

2 October 1994

FUNERARY STELE

Ache in my rust
this dwelling
of all opposites.
Come call it so,
a dither of unreadable
suchness, some day
all this language
will be yours,
spilled
hopeless in your lap
I love.

You loved me
for the lingo. Now both
are served with silence.

2 October 1994

The new day moves in by dark. It is Crugers (on Hudson)
and 5-Snake yields our place to 6-Death,
the where that we are. Montrose next stop. Bulletin:
from the Seventeenth Century this mountain teems with roses,

it is a grotto there that slips the mind
loose from political entanglement and leaves it free for politics.
Old wood, still umber, the Cross
on which some roses mean to twine, thorn-tangle,

dance form of that era, la Rosie+Crosse.
The tune's still with us. I hear a blind man
down there inside my chest sing it
so well I do not need to hear it ever sung again.

2 October 1994

METATARSALS

Sand swoop law of low
life is vulture
perch fallen column
broken jag of a hill's tooth
troth me a bridge
marathoning then
ten thousand people cross at once
what will we there
low hills chalk cliffs
sumac sintered down the rock
slopes like honey oozing
from the earth itself.
I am the only wound she has.

Say more of these
say more of me. Last communist
of Sunday night, I come
by cable into your least needs,

a closet full of me.
Reed and pampas grass and rue.

2 October 1994

Asgard enterprises. Touch. (A god
touches) is the dominant
demonstration. By law
all other senses are not tamed.
But lay a hand athwart an arm
it's tort, it's terrible, it's crime.
Only a god can touch. The law
despises the fleshly custom of
actual individuals.

2 October 1994, Rhinebeck

People who live in cities buy strange things for their pleasure.
Having no land, no privacy, no zone, yet needing to reward
themselves for all their hard labor
they choose autonomous centripetal devices (ACDs)
whose cost is strictly proportionate to the pleasure yielded.
Shoes with neon lights in them, loudspeakers costlier than cars,
gold wiring for their custom audios whereon
they listen to the same music everybody else does,
the packaged gospel of our Principals,
the Owners of us. People try to buy
a landscape inward, but those kind acres are not for sale.
Yet I think you can set out and find them any morning
over the hill of your head, far shimmer of most
intimate meadows.

3 October 1994

Heel in the hand. A practice of saying truth.
But is saying telling? And is telling truth?
The way the doctor's hands looked at me
(healing, wary, close, compassionate)
I felt like a child learning to pronounce my name.
So this is me, this mispronunciation,
this wrong meat. Who knows the true story?
The cut of a tree into a cloudless sky.

4 October 1994

Could this be an afterthought
or is this thought

itself island in the river,
people with cameras

an old church
 I gave you
what I thought

you wanted
more than I knew

this appetite of you
transfigured me

the whole city
was an afterthought.

5 October 1994

The name of the day gets longer than the light.
The name you call out — soft call
distinct in the hour between the dresser and the dinosaur,
when your eyes unfocussed suddenly just notice
how vast the seen world is, even here,
spaces inside spaces and no solid,

that name.

Later almost voluptuously you find occasion
to speak it. Out loud in a normal sentence
in the presence of ordinary traffic. Daytime.
People hear without seeming to do so —
you look keenly to see if they have understood.
As if you yourself did. You have no idea,
no idea of what *understanding a name*
could possibly mean. Maybe they
have something to teach you, a name
which, spoken, explains and changes the day.

6 October 1994

ARS POETICA

Or be in hiding. An exercise
compelling concentration. You sprawl,

and that is all. Be brief,
you thief—

my attention is the only wealth I own.

7 October 1994

A SOUND

From half a mile away the thunk
of the well-diggers' rig
carries oddly over the quiet morning.

Or is it my blood
marching past my ears
on the way to war.

I dreamt a child forgave me in the night.

7 October 1994

The last roses of summer (two red, one mango
colored) and two sprigs of lavender
in morning sun

the choosing
of our need, all our need is ocean,
ring-road of our city,

our weary home. Rigmarole of prose.
The prioress instructed me to go
hang my shield on the huge old yew tree

and smear its red berries on my gold.
Catch a sickness from the cat
and die of it. Damp rot

in the picnic table. Investigate.
Beneath this unleafy ramada
I am caught by the sun.

A dithering of crabapples, windy,
it is autumn over the first city
and we belong to Europe still here.

It must be difficult to be a leaf,
to be all mouth
open to the nutrient air

and by our very skin or selves procure
shade for blanched travellers.
Shadow where once I caught this shade—

a sycamore tree growing on the moon,
shabby lucid bark of you, a hale

magic in your bluish summer ocean

and these leaves too, sad meager ivy.

8 October 1994, Boston

SULFUR IN THE FORM OF NATIVE
CINNABAR

At any right angle.

I can't remember what they taught me to do, those women in black
dresses down to here. Down to the floor. So long ago it seems a
mystical initiation

by chalk-dusted rustling nobodies with sweet faces, hard hands
(thimble on a finger tip to tap a skull of mine or two), and such a
woman was called "none."

Why can't I remember what they taught me?

I who am nothing but what they taught me, I am their handwriting,
writing was the hardest thing, be legible,

keep the wrist moving, write with your arm not your fingers,

write with your body. Nobody. So green here in your mother's
garden, crabapple, ivy,

one is finally abandoned. One is finally returned to one's mind.

One is returned to what one has made of one's mind.

The only ardor to be free.

9 October 1994, Boston

A PRAISE OF SUKHASIDDHI

Where to put it
this cash I am

this banana tree
dying at the stream edge

because I forgot to think
water for a year or two

seven trees high
and just above it

light between
its leaves and her heels.

She who had been the helmetmaker's pretty wife was beautiful again.
Time was flushed clean.

And she spoke to me, Bliss Cunning spoke,
Enter the Empty Empire, all
you need is your breath.

9 October 1994, Boston

Driving near South Station thinking about Steve Jonas
—my interests ever other than his— how
could he not have been suspicious

—except to sing? One does who one can—
steals pants, prefers
one thing to another
and calls it music.

What else
could the child do
with all that weather
except to be?
To take up all that room just to be me!
No wonder he doubted.

I doubt me now
between the Viet noodle shop on Dorchester and the Muddy River
in explicit search for High Art
secretly hoping to see some ducks.

10 October 1994, Boston

THE CURVE OF THINGS

Can we speak honestly about a few things?
Did you really like the planter we bought at the yard sale
—full-sized white duck with an open back
for mistinguettes in pots— and are you sorry now
you sent me to that college where I learned
all the languages to say I won't?

All I ever wanted was routine. Any child
can tell you that, outposts of fantasy
and lots of food. Cars drift by in rain,
civilians listen to the Saturday opera, it is Time
having a nightmare in which I star,

forty years fast forward and the Queen is still alive ,
poised as a white statue —unchanging,
by Giulio Romano— we keep shrouded
like Lent in the music room. Can I forgive

myself for never growing old? What would it mean
to look and see and not see the beauty
of this late, last, rose withering on the table,
or not know what I do know? My wife's face,
her neck, the way the shoulders welcome it,

the curve of things. This Delft pepper shaker.
The unexpected sun above our whimsies.

11 October 1994, Boston

A WOMAN WITH TWO WOMBS GIVES BIRTH
TO TWO CHILDREN ON TWO DAYS

That there would be no less, a womb
opens into a womb. The precaution
of life to be. Exploded into our hands
and suddenly the child is there.

Inkspots on eyelids, a red and yellow flower
yielding a meek peppery taste,
then blackthorn, then scissors. We walked
along the Muddy River, someone had put midstream

a table set for two, fresh fruit salad, slices
of baguette, black coffee. Past this a drift of bird,
what Eddison called “the policy of the duck,”
serene above, quick pedalling beneath the surface.

Beneath the seen to reach the other side.

12 October 1994, Boston